

Summer Escapes in Argentina

By Ryley Hartt, JAXFAX, January 2011



Just as one cannot visit Argentina without noting the extraordinary convergence of European and provincial influence, it is similarly impossible not to be reminded of Galileo, who once referred to wine as “sunlight held together by water”. While for vacationing purposes it may be more fitting to think in terms of sunlight and water held together by wine, the point is that all three exist in staggering abundance in Argentina, which not only boasts one of the world’s most dynamic and accessible wine regions but also eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites, a true bucket list of natural wonders for active vacationers and an evolved infrastructure for worry-free travel to even the most remote corners of the map.

From the eclectic mix of Buenos Aires’ French and Italian architecture to the Jesuit Estancias of Cordoba and all the way to the Welsh colonies of Patagonia, there is evidence everywhere to suggest that this is a country chiefly comprised of foreigners who could not pull themselves away. The same holds true today, and whether initially drawn To trek across the Perito Moreno glacier, soak up the panoramic beauty of *Iguazu Falls*, get caught up in the throng at a Boca game (soccer), ski the Andes or discover firsthand why Argentines eat more beef per capita than anyone else, the greatest challenge for visitors is not finding the perfect niche but, having found it, resisting the urge to stay put.

The summer months (December-March) are perfect for just about anything except for riding the *subte*, but are especially suitable for exploring Mendoza during the wine harvest season, which culminates in a week-long *Vendimia* (grape harvest) festival at the beginning of March. A two-hour flight from Buenos Aires, the capital city of Mendoza is an attractive and convenient base of operations, with all the nightlife and accommodations of a big city centered round a large pedestrian plaza that feels like a charming oasis. Another option, just 30 minutes south of the city, is *Chacras Glebinias*, which was ranked among the top 10 Best Bargains and Best Hidden Gems in Trip Advisor’s 2009 Travelers’ Choice Awards. For activities Mendoza offers over 1,000 *bodegas* to choose from, so arranging a wine tour is no problem. The nearby Atuel and Diamante rivers also offer a wide range of rafting excursions for those looking for serious rapids or just a way to break up the afternoon.



Traveling north from Mendoza by car or bus, the breathtakingly beautiful *Ruta 40* extends all the way up the spine of the Andes to the Bolivian border, granting access to some of the most

spectacular and closely guarded treasures Argentina has to offer. The topography in the Northwest transforms repeatedly and without warning, from Andean foothills to the surreal volcanic moonscapes of *Tinogasta*, to sub-tropical jungle, to towering sandstone formations at *Las Flechas*.

Visitors can easily lose themselves in Salta's capital city, known primarily for the vibrantly colored Iglesia San Francisco and Pena dinner shows along the *Balcarce Strip*. *La Casona del Molino* is the best place to unwind over authentic empanadas and listen to folklore music into the wee hours after riding the tram to the top of San Bernardo Mountain to watch gauchos, day trips to *Cachi* and *Cafayate* in 4x4's and classes on how to cook all of the Northwest staples like empanadas, humitas, tamales and locro.

The final stop on the Northwest circuit is the *Quebrada de Humahuaca* in Jujuy. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003, this valley has served as a major trade route for over 10,000 years, with evidence of pre-Incan villages set among the looming bristled sierras, multi-colored hills and giant cardon cactus. The *Cerro de Siete Colores* in Purmamarca is the focal point of the Colorados tour, which also visits Humahuaca and Tilcara, where thousands of panpipe musicians descend from the hillsides every year on Easter.

With the exception of several destinations in Patagonia that offer direct service, nearly all domestic flights connect in Buenos Aires. Aerolineas Argentinas and LAN Argentina offer the best internal service, and it is recommended that Aerolineas customers make use of the new South American Pass to cut down on the tourist premium placed on domestic air travel. Overland travel on luxury buses is a cheap and reliable alternative for regional exploration, with numerous carriers offering daily service to major destinations north of Patagonia. Travel times vary, but Flecha Bus and Andesmar both offer overnight service from Retiro Station in Buenos Aires to Mendoza from AR\$160 for standard Semicama and AR\$250 for a fully-reclining Cama Suite.



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